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ABSTRACT

The Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) is an instructional program designed to ensure that all college students in Texas have the reading, math and writing skills necessary to perform effectively in college courses. One component of the TASP is a diagnostic test of reading, math and writing skills. Answers to the following questions about the TASP are provided: (1) who must take the test; (2) when must these students take the test; (3) when can high school students take the test; (4) what if a student does not pass the test; (5) can an institution use the TASP test as an admission requirement; (6) when and where will the test be administered; (7) how does a student register for the test; (8) when will students receive their test scores; (9) who will receive a copy of the test scores; (10) can scores from another test be used to satisfy the testing requirements; (11) how was the TASP test developed; (12) how and by whom is the test scores; (13) will a study guide be available; (14) where can students get more information about the TASP test and the testing requirement; (15) what are the characteristics of the test; and (16) what skills are measured on the test (descriptions of specific skills are given for reading, fundamental mathematics, algebra, elements of composition, and sentence structure, usage and mechanics). The state law requiring the test is appended. (KM)

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TEXAS ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAM (TASP)

TASP TEST: INFORMATION SUMMARY



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SEPTEMBER 1988

TEXAS ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAM

WHAT IS THE TEXAS ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAM (TASP)?

The TASP is an instructional program designed to ensure that all students attending public institutions of higher education in Texas have the reading, mathematics, and writing skills necessary to perform effectively in college-level coursework. The program was developed as a response to the growing evidence in Texas and other states that significant numbers of college students and graduates lack some of these basic academic skills.

The purpose of the TASP is to enrich the quality of higher education for Texas students. The TASP has five components: diagnostic testing, advisement, placement, remediation, and program evaluation. With this program, students who are under-prepared in reading, mathematics, or writing will be identified. To enable those students to benefit more fully from their higher education coursework, remedial activities will be offered to improve their levels of skills.

TASP Test

One component of the TASP is a test which assesses and provides some diagnostic information about the reading, mathematics, and writing skills of each student. In spring 1987, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 2182 (HB 2182), which mandated the development of the TASP Test. HB 2182 also requires that all students entering institutions of higher education in Texas in fall 1989 or later take the TASP Test, and that each institution must offer remediation to any student not passing the test.

This publication presents an overview of various information relating to the TASP Test. Students should consult their academic advisor and the TASP Test Registration Bulletin for complete information.

(NOTE: The TASP Test is also used, beginning in spring 1989, to assess the reading, mathematics, and writing skills of students in teacher education programs in Texas (as required by TEC 13.032). For more information on the specific requirements for teacher education students, contact your academic advisor.)

WHO MUST TAKE THE TEST?

The requirements for taking the TASP Test apply to students who are entering or enrolled in a Texas public institution of higher education and to teacher education students at both public and private institutions in Texas.

Any person who is a full-time or part-time student who has not earned at least three semester credit hours prior to fall 1989 must take the TASP Test if any one of the conditions listed below applies:

- That person enrolls in a college-level degree program as a student;

- That person enters a certificate program that contains nine (9) or more semester credit hours or the equivalent of general education courses as defined by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools;
- That person is any other student, including a student transferring from outside Texas or from a private Texas college or university;
- That person is a student seeking admission to a Texas upper-level institution or program that requires the TASP Test as a condition of admission.

A person must also take the TASP Test if he or she is a student seeking to enter a Texas-approved teacher education program, a person renewing a Texas emergency teaching permit, or a person seeking a Texas teacher certificate through an approved alternative certification program. This person must take the TASP Test regardless of the number of semester credit hours earned prior to fall 1989. (The TASP Test replaces the P-PST, previously used for these purposes. A person who has not passed a portion of the P-PST needs to pass only that section of the TASP Test. Until May 1, 1991, P-PST scores will be recognized for teacher education and certification purposes.)

A person is exempt from taking the TASP Test if:

- That person enters or is currently in a certificate program that contains fewer than nine (9) semester credit hours or the equivalent of general education courses as defined by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; and/or
- That person has earned at least three (3) semester credit hours of college-level work prior to fall 1989.

Individuals should contact the higher education institution they are attending or planning to attend about these policies.

WHEN MUST THESE STUDENTS TAKE THE TEST?

All full-time or part-time freshmen enrolled in certain certificate programs and all degree programs must take the TASP Test prior to gaining nine (9) or more college-level semester credit hours (or the equivalent). If their college or university chooses to give them a placement test immediately upon entry, those students are then required to take the TASP Test prior to the end of the semester in which they accumulate fifteen (15) or more college-level semester credit hours.

Any other student, including transfer students from private or out-of-state institutions, must take the TASP Test prior to the accumulation of nine or more college-level semester credit hours or the equivalent in a Texas public institution of higher education.

A student who does not take the test within the prescribed period of time will not be permitted to re-enroll at the institution (or to enroll in any other Texas public higher education institution) in any courses other than non-credit remedial, developmental, or other pre-collegiate courses until the test has been taken.

WHEN CAN STUDENTS WHO ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL TAKE THE TEST?

Individuals who are currently enrolled in a Texas high school may take the TASP Test only if:

- they have passed all portions of the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) exit-level test;

AND

- they are either concurrently enrolled in a college or university course while attending high school or have been accepted for future admittance by an institution of higher education.

Once a student has graduated, that student is eligible to take the TASP Test at any time.

WHAT IF A STUDENT DOES NOT PASS THE TEST?

Any college or university student who does not pass all three sections (reading, mathematics, and writing) of the TASP Test:

- must participate continuously in a remediation program in the subject area(s) not passed;
- may not enroll in any upper-division course the completion of which would give the student sixty (60) or more semester credit hours or the equivalent; and
- may not graduate from a certificate program having nine or more semester credit hours (or the equivalent) of general education coursework, an associate degree program, or a baccalaureate degree program.

(NOTE: A teacher education student may not enroll in teacher education courses beyond six hours without having satisfied the basic skills testing requirement. Individuals on emergency teaching permits must pass the test before a permit can be renewed, and persons seeking teacher certification through an alternative certification program must pass the test prior to being admitted.)

A student may retake the test as many times as needed. Only the section(s) of the test not passed must be retaken.

CAN AN INSTITUTION USE THE TASP TEST AS AN ADMISSION REQUIREMENT?

The law prohibits colleges or universities from using the successful completion of the TASP Test as a criterion for admission except in the case of those few institutions which, by law, offer only upper-division courses (i.e., junior- or senior-level coursework).

WHEN AND WHERE WILL THE TEST BE ADMINISTERED?

The TASP Test will be administered, beginning in March 1989, on Saturday mornings five times per year at about 100 test centers throughout Texas. Test centers will usually be located on college and university campuses, although other facilities (e.g., community auditoriums) may also be used.

The TASP Test Registration Bulletin contains exact information on test dates and registration deadlines.

WHAT IS THE COST OF THE TEST?

Information about the cost is provided in the TASP Test Registration Bulletin. The cost is \$24.

IS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR TAKING THE TEST?

In some cases, financial assistance for taking the test may be available. Individuals who might be eligible for this type of assistance should contact the academic advisor or financial aid office at their college or university.

HOW DOES A STUDENT REGISTER FOR THE TEST?

The TASP Test Registration Bulletin contains complete information and all forms needed for registering for the test. Beginning in late fall 1988, registration bulletins are available through all public colleges and universities and most school districts. An individual can also request a bulletin from National Evaluation Systems (NES), the test contractor for the TASP Test.

The TASP Test Registration Bulletin lists the deadlines for registering for each administration of the test. Deadlines for registering to take the TASP Test have been arranged to allow an individual a reasonable amount of time in which to register. However, all registration deadlines as listed in the TASP Test Registration Bulletin are strictly followed and an extension of time beyond the registration deadline will not be made.

An individual is encouraged to register as early as possible to take the test. Every effort will be made to test each examinee on the test date and at the test center desired; however, because of limitations on the number of test administrations and the amount of testing space available, some examinees may be tested at their second- or third-choice test center on their second-choice test date.

WHEN WILL STUDENTS RECEIVE THEIR TEST SCORES?

Scores will be mailed no later than five (5) weeks after the test is administered. (For the March 1989 administration only, test scores will be mailed approximately eleven (11) weeks after the test.)

WHO WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THE TEST SCORES?

In addition to an examinee receiving his or her test scores, the scores are reported to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Scores will also be reported, at the examinee's request, to Texas colleges and universities.

State law requires that institutions report, to the high school or community college last attended, each student's performance during the first year enrolled after graduation from high school. In addition to other student performance data, the annual report will include a student's TASP Test scores. This report from colleges and universities may aid high schools in evaluating and improving the effectiveness of their curriculum and instruction.

CAN SCORES FROM ANOTHER TEST (E.G., EXIT-LEVEL TEAMS, SAT, ACT) BE USED TO SATISFY THE REQUIREMENT OF HB 2182?

No, only scores from the TASP Test can be used to satisfy the testing requirement. The TASP Test has been validated as measuring the skills which students should have to perform effectively in college-level coursework in Texas. The use of the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) exit-level test, for example, would be inappropriate because the TEAMS is designed to measure the minimum skills each student must have in order to graduate from high school, rather than the skills needed for effective college or university performance.

HOW WAS THE TASP TEST DEVELOPED?

The TASP Test was developed under the guidance of the THECB and the TEA. National Evaluation Systems, Inc., (NES) of Amherst, Massachusetts, was selected to develop and administer the TASP Test.

The test was developed with extensive input from Texas educators. Over 5,000 educators participated in the process through content-advisory, bias-review, standard-setting, and other committees, as well as through regional panels and statewide surveys. Recommendations from the various committees and other data are used as a basis by which the THECB and the State Board of Education (SBOE) select the skills to be measured on the test, set the passing scores, and make other program decisions.

HOW AND BY WHOM IS THE TASP TEST SCORED?

The test is scored by NES, the test contractor for the TASP Test. The multiple-choice test items are scored by a computer. Each examinee's essay is scored independently by two highly-trained readers. If there is a discrepancy between the scores of the two readers, a third "chief" reader scores the essay and resolves the disagreement.

WILL A STUDY GUIDE BE AVAILABLE?

The best preparation for the TASP Test, of course, is knowledge and skills gained through elementary- and secondary-school coursework in reading, mathematics, and writing. To supplement that preparation, The Official TASP Test Study Guide is being published by NES. It contains lists of the skills measured on the test, sample test items, and other helpful information.

WHERE CAN STUDENTS GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE TASP TEST AND THE TESTING REQUIREMENT?

TASP information can be obtained from their academic advisor (high school or college counselor). Students should consult the TASP Test Registration Bulletin for information on issues related to the TASP Test, including how to order the The Official TASP Test Study Guide. In addition to higher education institutions and school districts, the TASP Test Registration Bulletin can be ordered (beginning in winter 1988) from:

Texas Academic Skills Program
National Evaluation Systems, Inc.
P. O. Box 140347
Austin, TX 78714-0347

For questions about TASP Test policies and general administration issues, contact:

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
University and Health Affairs Division
P. O. Box 12780
Austin, TX 78711
(512) 462-6485

Texas Education Agency
Division of Teacher Assessment
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701
(512) 463-9525

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TASP TEST?

The TASP Test provides a comparison of the skill levels of an individual student with the skill levels students should have to perform effectively in an undergraduate degree program. Each section (reading, mathematics, and writing) is comprised of approximately 40 to 50 multiple-choice test questions having four response options. In addition to multiple-choice questions, the writing section requires examinees to write an essay of about 300-600 words.

The test is designed so that most students should be able to finish all three sections within four (4) hours. However, an additional hour beyond four hours is provided if needed. A student can use the time available to finish all three sections of the test, or to complete only one or two sections.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the State Board of Education (SBOE) set the passing scores for the TASP Test based upon recommendations from Texas educators. The two Boards review the passing scores periodically.

TASP Test score reports indicate how an examinee performed on each of the three sections of the test, as well as by skill subareas within each section. If an examinee does not pass the essay portion of the writing section, the score report also provides an analytical evaluation of the types of errors the examinee made in the essay.

WHAT SKILLS ARE MEASURED ON THE TASP TEST?

Each section (reading, mathematics, and writing) of the TASP Test is defined by a list of broadly-stated academic skills. The academic skills for each section of the test have been reviewed and judged appropriate by thousands of Texas college and university faculty, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and the State Board of Education (SBOE). The skills represent the knowledge students in Texas must have if they are to perform effectively in an undergraduate degree program.

The THECB and the SBOE have adopted the skills listed below. Each skill is accompanied by a brief description of how the skill may be assessed on the test.

READING SKILLS

General Description: The reading section of the TASP Test consists of approximately ten to twelve reading selections of 300 to 750 words each. The selections represent a variety of subject areas and are similar to reading materials (e.g., textbooks, manuals) that a student is likely to encounter during the first year of college. The student will be asked to answer several multiple-choice questions about each reading selection.

Skill Descriptions: The reading section is based on the skills listed below.

Skill: Determine the meaning of words and phrases.

Description: Includes using the context of a passage to determine the meaning of words with multiple meanings, unfamiliar and uncommon words and phrases, and figurative expressions.

Skill: Understand the main idea and supporting details in written material.

Description: Includes identifying explicit and implicit main ideas and recognizing ideas that support, illustrate, or elaborate the main idea of a passage.

Skill: Identify a writer's purpose, point of view, and intended meaning.

Description: Includes recognizing a writer's expressed or implied purpose for writing; evaluating the appropriateness of written material for various purposes or audiences; recognizing the likely effect on an audience of a writer's choice of words; and using the content, word choice, and phrasing of a passage to determine a writer's opinion or point of view.

Skill: Analyze the relationship among ideas in written material.

Description: Includes identifying the sequence of events or steps, identifying cause-effect relationships, analyzing relationships between ideas in opposition, identifying solutions to problems, and drawing conclusions inductively and deductively from information stated or implied in a passage.

Skill: Use critical reasoning skills to evaluate written material.

Description: Includes evaluating the stated or implied assumptions on which the validity of a writer's argument depends; judging the relevance or importance of facts, examples, or graphic data to a writer's argument; evaluating the logic of a writer's argument; evaluating the validity of analogies; distinguishing between fact and opinion; and assessing the credibility or objectivity of the writer or source of written material.

Skill: Apply study skills to reading assignments.

Description: Includes organizing and summarizing information for study purposes; following written instructions or directions; and interpreting information presented in charts, graphs, or tables.

MATHEMATICS SKILLS

General Description: The mathematics section of the TASP Test consists of approximately 50 multiple-choice questions covering three general areas: fundamental mathematics, algebra, and geometry. The test questions focus on a student's ability to perform mathematical operations and solve problems. Appropriate formulas will be provided to help the student perform some of the calculations required by the test questions.

Skill Descriptions: The mathematics section is based on the skills listed below.

Fundamental Mathematics

Skill: Use number concepts and computation skills.

Description: Includes adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing fractions, decimals, and integers; using the order of operations to solve problems; solving problems involving percents; performing calculations using exponents and scientific notation; estimating solutions to problems; and using the concepts of "less than" and "greater than."

Skill: Solve word problems involving integers, fractions, or decimals (including percents, ratios, and proportions).

Description: Includes determining the appropriate operations to solve word problems and solving word problems involving integers, fractions, decimals, percents, ratios, and proportions.

Skill: Interpret information from a graph, table, or chart.

Description: Includes interpreting information in line graphs, bar graphs, pie graphs, pictographs, tables, charts, or graphs of functions.

Algebra

Skill: Graph numbers or number relationships.

Description: Includes identifying points from their coordinates, the coordinates of points, or graphs of sets of ordered pairs; identifying the graphs of equations or inequalities; finding the slopes and intercepts of lines; and recognizing direct and inverse variation presented graphically.

Skill: Solve one- and two-variable equations.

Description: Includes finding the value of the unknown in one-variable equations, expressing one variable in terms of a second variable in two-variable equations, and solving a system of two linear equations in two variables.

Skill: Solve word problems involving one and two variables.

Description: Includes solving word problems that can be translated into one-variable linear equations or systems of two-variable linear equations and identifying the equation or equations that correctly represent the mathematical relationship(s) in word problems.

Skill: Understand operations with algebraic expressions.

Description: Includes factoring quadratics and polynomials; adding, subtracting, and multiplying polynomial expressions; and performing basic operations on and simplifying rational expressions.

Skill: Solve problems involving quadratic equations.

Description: Includes graphing quadratic equations, solving word problems involving quadratics, identifying the algebraic equivalent of stated relationships, and solving quadratic equations.

Geometry

Skill: Solve problems involving geometric figures.

Description: Includes identifying the appropriate formula for solving geometric problems, solving problems involving two- and three-dimensional geometric figures, and solving problems involving right triangles using the Pythagorean theorem.

Skill: Apply reasoning skills.

Description: Includes drawing conclusions using the principles of similarity, congruence, parallelism, and perpendicularity; and using inductive and deductive reasoning.

WRITING SKILLS

General Description: The writing section of the TASP Test consists of two parts: a multiple-choice part and a writing sample (essay) part. The multiple-choice part will include approximately 40 questions assessing a student's ability to recognize various elements of effective writing. The writing sample part will require the student to demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively in writing on a given topic.

Skill Descriptions -- Multiple-Choice Part: The multiple-choice part of the writing section is based on the skills listed below.

(Please note that the term "standard" as used below refers to language use that conforms to the conventions of edited American English.)

Elements of Composition

Skill: Recognize purpose and audience.

Description: Includes recognizing the appropriate purpose, audience, or occasion for a piece of writing; and recognizing writing that is appropriate for various purposes, audiences, or occasions.

Skill: Recognize unity, focus, and development in writing.

Description: Includes recognizing unnecessary shifts in point of view or distracting details that impair the development of the main idea in a piece of writing and recognizing revisions that improve the unity and focus of a piece of writing.

Skill: Recognize effective organization in writing.

Description: Includes recognizing methods of paragraph organization and the appropriate use of transitional words or phrases to convey text structure, and reorganizing sentences to improve cohesion and the effective sequence of ideas.

Sentence Structure, Usage, and Mechanics

Skill: Recognize effective sentences.

Description: Includes recognizing ineffective repetition and inefficiency in sentence construction; identifying sentence fragments and run-on sentences; identifying standard subject-verb agreement; identifying standard placement of modifiers, parallel structure, and use of negatives in sentence formation; and recognizing imprecise and inappropriate word choice.

Skill: Recognize edited American English usage.

Description: Includes recognizing the standard use of verb forms and pronouns; recognizing the standard formation and use of adverbs, adjectives, comparatives, superlatives, and plural and possessive forms of nouns; and recognizing standard punctuation.

Skill Descriptions -- Writing Sample Part: The writing sample part of the TASP Test consists of one writing assignment. The student is asked to prepare an essay of about 300 to 600 words on an assigned topic. The student's writing sample is scored on the basis of how effectively the student communicates a whole message to a specified audience for a stated purpose. The following characteristics are considered in scoring the writing sample.

- **APPROPRIATENESS** -- the extent to which the student addresses the topic and uses language and style appropriate to the given audience, purpose, and occasion.
- **UNITY AND FOCUS** -- the clarity with which the student states and maintains a main idea or point of view.
- **DEVELOPMENT** -- the amount, depth, and specificity of supporting detail the student provides.

- ORGANIZATION -- the clarity of the student's writing and the logical sequence of the student's ideas.
- SENTENCE STRUCTURE -- the effectiveness of the student's sentence structure and the extent to which the student's writing is free of errors in sentence structure.
- USAGE -- the extent to which the student's writing is free of errors in usage and shows care and precision in word choice.
- MECHANICAL CONVENTIONS -- the student's ability to spell common words and use the conventions of capitalization and punctuation.

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§ 51.306. Testing and Remedial Coursework

(a) In this section, "board" and "institution of higher education" have the meanings assigned by Section 61.003 of this code.

(b) All students in the following categories who enter public institutions of higher education in the fall of 1989 and thereafter must be tested for reading, writing, and mathematics skills:

- (1) all full-time and part-time freshmen enrolled in a certificate or degree program;
- (2) any other student, prior to the accumulation of nine or more semester credit hours or the equivalent; and
- (3) any transfer student with fewer than 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent who has not previously taken the tests.

For that purpose, the institution shall use a test instrument prescribed by the board. The same instrument shall be used at all public institutions of higher education.

(c) The test instrument adopted by the board must be of a diagnostic nature and be designed to provide a comparison of the skill level of the individual student with the skill level necessary for a student to perform effectively in an undergraduate degree program. In developing the test, the board shall consider the recommendations of faculty from various institutions of higher education.

(d) An institution may not use performance on the test as a condition of admission into the institution.

(e) The board shall prescribe minimum performance standards for the test instrument. A student whose performance is below the standard for tested skill must participate in a remediation program. An institution may require higher performance standards.

(f) If the test results indicate that remedial education is necessary in any area tested, the institution shall refer the student to remedial courses or other remedial programs made available by the institution. Each institution shall make available those courses and programs on the same campus at which the student would otherwise attend classes. The

courses or programs may not be considered as credit toward completion of degree requirements.

(g) A student may not enroll in any upper division course completion of which would give the student 60 or more semester credit hours or the equivalent until the student's test results meet or exceed the minimum standards in all test scores. The board shall establish other assessment procedures to be used by institutions in exceptional cases to allow a student to enroll in upper division courses in cases where student test results do not meet minimum standards.

(h) The state shall continue to fund approved nondegree credit remedial courses. Additionally, the board shall develop formulas to augment institutional funding of other remedial academic programs. The additional funding required under such formulas shall be met by state appropriation for fiscal years 1990-1991 and thereafter.

(i) Each institution shall establish an advising program to advise students at every level of courses and degree options that are appropriate for the individual student.

(j) The unit costs of each test shall be borne by the student. Costs of administering the tests to students shown to be financially needy under criteria established by the board shall be borne by the state through appropriation to the board for that purpose or other sources of funds. Additionally, appropriation shall be made to the board to cover overall administrative costs of the testing program.

(k) Each institution shall report annually to the board, on or before a day set by rule of the board, concerning the results of the students being tested and the effectiveness of the institution's remedial program and advising program. The report shall identify by name the high school from which each tested student graduated and a statement as to whether or not the student's performance was above or below the standard. For the purposes of this report, students shall not be identified by name.

Added by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 807, § 1, eff. Aug. 31, 1987.

1987 Legislation

Section 2 of the 1987 Act provides:

"The test required by this Act shall be administered to students beginning with those stu-

dents entering institutions of higher education for the first time no later than the fall semester 1989."

§ 51.403. Reports of Student Enrollment and Academic Performance

(a) All higher education institutions of this state shall offer only such courses and teach such classes as are economically justified in the considered judgment of the appropriate governing board.

(b) After the end of each spring semester the chief executive officer of each institution shall provide its governing board a report for the preceding fall and spring semesters indicating for each instructor the number of students enrolled in each class, the number of semester-credit hours accrued to each course, the course number and title, the department in which the course is offered, and the identity and academic rank of the instructor.

(c) A report prepared under Subsection (b) of this section must compare student enrollments in each class on the last day of each semester with enrollments at the beginning of that semester.

(d) Each institution shall file with its governing board and the coordinating board a small class report, excluding individual instruction courses, indicating department, course number, title of course, and the name of the instructor. "Small classes," for the purpose of this report, are undergraduate-level courses with less than 10 registrations, and graduate-level courses with less than 5 registrations. No small classes shall be offered in any institution except as authorized by the appropriate governing board, within the guidelines established by the Coordinating Board.

(e) Under guidelines established by the Coordinating Board, Texas College and University System, and the State Board of Education, postsecondary institutions shall report student performance during the first year enrolled after graduation from high school to the high school or junior college last attended. This report shall include, but not be

limited to, appropriate student test scores, a description of developmental courses required, and the student's grade point average. Appropriate safeguards for student privacy shall be included in the rules for implementation of this subsection.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 665, § 2, eff. Aug. 31, 1987.

1987 Legislation

The 1987 amendment, in the heading, added "and Academic Performance", and added subsec. (e).



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